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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000607

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SUBJECT: ETHNIC POLITICS IN GUINEA - HAAL PULAR

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 B. CONAKRY 0602

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. This cable is the third in a series of reports exploring the role of ethnicity in Guinean politics (reftels). The leader of Haal Pular, a Peuhl youth organization, claims to have more than 20,000 members both within the country and from the Guinean Diaspora. Often criticized as a divisive organization focused on promoting exclusively Peuhl interests, Haal Pular has recently been coming up regularly in the press and in conversations with other contacts. Poloff's discussion with the organization's leader suggests that Haal Pular is a significant player in Guinea's political scene, and supportive of Prime Minister Souare and opposition leader Cellou Diallo, both of whom are Peuhls. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met with Alpha Yagouba Sow, President of Haal Pular, an ethnically based youth organization (Peuhl/Fulani) that falls under the umbrella of the Council of Elders, which includes ethnic organizations from each of Guinea's four natural regions. A member of Haal Pular's executive bureau also attended the meeting. Alpha Sow is currently Prime Minister Souare's &Chief of Protocol at Souare's private residence. He was unavailable for an earlier meeting because he was reportedly accompanying the PM to various events. Later information from other contacts suggests that some members of Haal Pular are contesting Sow's presidency. Sow spoke broken French, and certain comments throughout the discussion indicate that he may not have a strong educational background.

NATION-WIDE ORGANIZATION

¶3. (SBU) According to Sow, Haal Pular has offices installed throughout the country, in each of Guinea's 33 prefectures. He said that the organization's main purpose is to resolve potential conflicts between regions and ethnic groups. On the question of membership, Sow said that Haal Pular had printed 30,000 membership cards about seven months ago, which they ran out of just a few months after printing. Sow said that 5,000 cards were distributed in Conakry, 5,000 in the interior, and 20,000 to Guineans living abroad. Sow said that Haal Pular had existed in the past, but that they decided to renew membership after the strikes and civil unrest of 2007. The president claimed to have members from all of Guinea's various ethnic groups, but later acknowledged that the majority of members are from the Peuhl ethnic group.

¶4. (SBU) In response to a question about whether the group gets involved in politics, Sow was at first confused, and then said that Haal Pular has nothing to do with politics. &We get together to discuss youth problems and how to help

youths,⁸ he said. When pressed, he said that many of the youth,s problems are political, so the discussion sometimes becomes more political in nature.

GUINEA,S ÆNIC PROBLEM8

¶15. (SBU) Poloff asked if there is an ethnic problem in Guinea, to which Sow emphatically replied &yes.⁸ According to Sow, he and other members of Haal Pular saw various political actors using ethnicity to try and manipulate youths and others during the 2007 strikes, which prompted them to revitalize their organization once the strikes were over. He said that Haal Pular is communicating with other youth groups and that there is &no problem between us.⁸ Sow added, however, that relations sometimes become difficult because people disagree on key issues.

¶16. (SBU) When asked to explain possible reasons for the Ænic problem,⁸ Sow said that tensions revolve around the grab for power. &There are four groups fighting for power in Guinea, and that is what it is all about,⁸ he said, alluding to the four commonly identified ethnic groups (Malinke, Peuhl, Sossou, and the Forest tribes). According to Sow, the government and individual political players are using ethnicity to manipulate people in order to have access to power. Sow specifically mentioned former Finance Minister Kassory Fofana as one of the key political players distributing money to various groups.

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PRO-SOUARE, PRO-CELLOU, PRO-PEUHL

¶17. (SBU) Referring to subtle tensions between Malinkes and Peuhls, Poloff asked if these issues would influence who ultimately ends up as president or prime minister. Sow said that &we need someone who is capable, who can manage the country.⁸ He added that the current prime minister, Ahmed Tidiane Souare (a Peuhl), has proven that he is capable of being such a leader. Sow said that Souare has fairly balanced his cabinet among the ethnic groups, and that he has already proven his abilities. When Poloff asked for an example of Souare,s success, Sow said that the PM is doing an excellent job responding to people,s demands for electricity and water. &I personally went with him when he delivered transformers to different neighborhoods; the people were happy,⁸ he said. &The current government is doing a good job,⁸ he added. When asked for further elaboration, Sow said &I don,t see any problems with this government.⁸

¶18. (SBU) Poloff mentioned recent civil protests against the lack of electricity, noting that most of these demonstrations involve youths in predominantly Peuhl neighborhoods. Sow agreed, but said &I know these people; I can call them up in the middle of a riot and order them to stop if I want to.⁸

¶19. (SBU) In response to a question about opposition political leaders and their support for elections, Sow said that Alpha Conde, the leader of the predominantly Malinke Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) party, &cannot win an election.⁸ According to Sow, RPG party members are currently divided with some members supporting Alpha Conde and others voicing support for former prime minister Lansana Kouyate (a Malinke).

¶10. (SBU) Among the major Peuhl political parties, Sow said that former Prime Minister Cellou Diallo, head of the Union of Guinean Democratic Forces (UFDG), is clearly a favorite. He said that Ousmane Bah, leader of the Union for Progress and Renewal (UPR) has been steadily losing ground to Cellou. (COMMENT. Cellou Diallo is considered close to Prime Minister Souare. END COMMENT). Sow added that Cellou stands

a good chance of winning both the legislative and the presidential elections because he is attractive not only to the Peuhls, but also to the Soussous of Maritime Guinea. &I have been working with Bas-Cote (a Soussou youth group) and am responsible for bringing everyone together,⁸ he said.

EXPLAINING THE FISTFIGHT

¶11. (SBU) Poloff mentioned a recent brawl between various youth groups that reportedly involved Haal Pular. Referring to a loose underground youth movement for reform, Sow said &they were meeting in my territory and they can not do that without inviting me.⁸ He added that he did attend the meeting in the end, with about 15 youths from his organization, but that he was not notified of the meeting until the last minute. According to Sow, the youth groups wanted to &make trouble.⁸ He said that he left before the brawl started, but understood that members of Haal Pular were involved in the fistfight.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Sow's demeanor and general attitude made him seem like more of a gang leader than a youth leader. He came across as passionately committed to his personal beliefs, and narrowly focused on the interests of his own ethnic group. His organization has been heavily criticized in recent months for its bias towards the prime minister. Haal Pular has also been perceived by others as a group for sale to the highest bidder, and one of the organizations responsible for underscoring ethnic differences and perpetuating existing tensions. Sow was clearly pro-Souare, and by extension, supportive of former Prime Minister Cellou Diallo. Similar to his Union Mandinge counterparts and their convictions about Alpha Conde (reftel B), Sow was convinced that the country's leading Peuhl candidate would win elections. END COMMENT.

RASPOLIC